

# BERLINER UNTERWELTEN E.V.

Gesellschaft zur Erforschung und Dokumentation unterirdischer Bauten



## Brunnenstraße 141-143 – An area with history

If you follow Brunnenstrasse to the left for about 100 metres, you will see that the street – steep by Berlin standards – leads downhill. That's because you're still on the heights of Barnim, while the city centre is located in the Warsaw-Berlin glacial valley, a drainage channel from the last ice age around 18,000 years ago.

Due to the favourable conditions regarding the very low groundwater level, numerous breweries established themselves north and south of the valley from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The deep cellars, which were necessary for beer production, could be built here free of groundwater. In general, the brewers were the first to use the Berlin underground in a major structural way. Here again, between Brunnen-, Rheinsberger, Strelitzer and Bernauer Strasse, a brewery site was created under different names from the mid-1850s and, from 1875, under the name of the Jewish entrepreneur, Oswald Berliner (\* 1832 † 1900), as the “first Berlin wheat beer brewery Oswald Berliner”. There was also a tavern at Brunnenstrasse 143, which was popularly known as the “Poison Shack” (Giftbude).

A drop in sales during the course of the First World War eventually led to the financial collapse and closure of the brewery. Even today, however, the “OB” sign on the gate (a few metres to your right) bears witness to its history.

Even structural relics such as the extensive cellars, which stretch almost as far as Strelitzer Strasse, remained partially preserved. During the Second World War, some areas of the vaulted cellar were converted into a large, two-storey bunker complex for around 3,000 people. During the bombing attacks, local residents found shelter within.

After the war ended, many of Berlin's bunker facilities were blown up on the Allies' decision. Even here, a powerful detonation shook the area on April 11<sup>th</sup>, 1946. As a result of the blast, the entire yard surface rose briefly, then collapsed and fell into the destroyed bunker. Several buildings in the area were considerably damaged in places. Most cavities were filled with debris a year later, then the area was levelled. However, some cellar vaults, especially under Brunnenstrasse 143, remained intact.

With the building of the Berlin Wall in August 1961, the area became the borderland. The houses on the East Berlin side of Bernauer Strasse were gradually demolished as the border installation expanded. In the mid-1960s, rubble was used to fill the last cavities of the former brewery cellars in order to prevent the rooms being used in any way for the construction of escape tunnels.

However, in the years that followed, Bernauer Strasse developed into a focal point of escape tunnel construction, where the very low-lying groundwater level again played a role. Over a distance of just 350 metres, the border installation here was tunnelled under seven times. Many escape tunnel projects failed as a result of betrayal, or they were discovered by GDR State Security, like the tunnel from 1970/71, which reached from the northern side of Bernauer Strasse, then West Berlin, to under the property at

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Brunnenstrasse 141 and 142. The *Berlin Underworlds Association* has “excavated” this tunnel to create a visitor tunnel some 30 metres in length, eight metres deep. It can be seen on *Tour M – Under the Berlin Wall*, in which escapes under the Berlin Wall are discussed.

For this, the Association has cleared several basement vaults of debris in Brunnenstrasse 143 and made them usable for tours, exhibitions and events. The function room for the Association’s educational seminars is located on the ground floor of Brunnenstrasse 142. The basement of Brunnenstrasse 141 is the end point of the aforementioned *Tour M* and also an exhibition space. All construction measures are exclusively financed by the Association.

## Image legend:

The area in Straube’s general plan (1910). © Landesarchiv Berlin

Oswald-Berliner-Brewery staff (1908). © Archiv Berliner Unterwelten e.V.

The remains of the bunker facility built into the cellars (2013). ©Berliner Unterwelten e.V., K.-U. Noack

Bernauer Strasse / Strelitzer Strasse border area (1964). © Archiv Berliner Unterwelten e.V.

Rediscovered escape tunnel from 1970/71 (2018). ©Berliner Unterwelten e.V., C. Schindler

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